

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 204243

FOR MR. GEISE - PLEASE PASS ASST SEC DALLEY

FOL RPT BELIZE 570 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO GUATEMALA & LONDON
DTD 25 AUG 77

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 570

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, BH, GT, UK

SUBJECT: CLARIFICATION OF AMBASSADOR YOUNG'S STATEMENT ON BELIZE

REF: A) GUATEMALA 5329 B) STATE 189611

1. SUMMARY: CLARIFICATION HAS ALREADY BEEN COMMUNICATED TO SOURCE OF BELIZE TIMES EDITORIAL POLICY AND HAS ALSO BEEN CARRIED BY AN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER. UNSOLICITED CIRCULATION BY US TO ALL BELIZEAN MEDIA INCLUDING OPPOSITION PRESS MIGHT PRODUCE RESULTS INIMICAL TO INTERESTS OF GOG, EMBASSY GUATEMALA, AND OURSELVES. RECOMMENDATION IS THAT I BE INSTRUCTED FORMALLY TO TRANSMIT CLARIFICATION TO BELIZE TIMES WHICH COMES AS CLOSE AS CAN BE REASONABLY EXPECTED TO ACCEDING TO RODRIGUEZ' REQUEST. END SUMMARY.

2. CONTRARY TO RODRIGUEZ' ASSERTION THAT DEPARTMENT'S CLARIFICATION IS
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CATION OF AMBASSADOR YOUNG'S AUGUST 9 STATEMENT HAD NEVER APPEARED IN BELIZE PRESS, FULL TEXT OF AUGUST 11 PRESS GUIDANCE APPEARED IN AUGUST 14 EDITION OF TOLEDO STAR, AN OPPOSITION WEEKLY PUBLISHED IN PUNTA GORDA. STAR'S STORY WAS FRONT PAGE LEAD ARTICLE HEADLINED "USA NEUTRAL IN BELIZE-GUATEMALA QUESTION SAYS STATE DEPARTMENT". (NOTE: TOLEDO STAR HAS OFTEN (ESPECIALLY RECENTLY) CARRIED ARTICLES WHICH COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN

GUATEMALA AND WITH SOME OFFICIAL GOG GUIDANCE. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE RODRIGUEZ WAS NOT AWARE OF THIS STORY.)

3. I HAD ALREADY INFORMALLY COMMUNICATED TEXT OF CLARIFICATION TO GOB VIA MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS LOUIS SYLVESTER WHO HAD BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF YOUNG'S STATEMENT IN COURSE OF TELEPHONE CALL ON ANOTHER MATTER. THERE IS NO REASONABLE DOUBT THAT CLARIFICATION WAS RELAYED TO SOURCE OF BELIZE TIMES EDITORIAL POLICY, NAMELY PREMIER GEORGE PRICE.

4. MY SUGGESTION AS TO HOW RODRIGUEZ REQUEST MIGHT BEST BE DEALT WITH WOULD BE FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO INSTRUCT ME TO SEND A COPY OF THE AUGUST 11 GUIDANCE TO THE BELIZE TIMES UNDER COVER OF A LETTER FROM ME.

5. I WOULD BE PLEASED TO MAKE TEXT OF CLARIFICATION AVAILABLE TO ANYONE INDICATING AN INTEREST IN THE MATTER BUT I HAVE MISGIVINGS ABOUT TAKING THE INITIATIVE IN CIRCULATING IT TO BELIZE MEDIA AS CONTEMPLATED IN REF A. THE TEXT ITSELF POSES NO PROBLEM, BUT MUCH WOULD PROBABLY BE MADE OF MY CIRCULATING IT GRATUITOUSLY. BELIZE PRESS IS TOTALLY IRRESPONSIBLE AND OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS BEACON, REPORTER AND AMANDALA COULD BE EXPECTED TO DISTORT BEYOND RECOGNITION ANY COMMUNICATION FROM THE CONSULATE GENERAL TRANSMITTING AN UNSOLICITED CLARIFICATION OF AMBASSADOR YOUNG'S STATEMENT. WHETHER THESE DISTORTIONS WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A) RIDICULING BELIZE TIMES ORIGINAL ARTICLE, B) ATTACKING CREDIBILITY OF GOB'S CONFIDENTIAL

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FOREIGN POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS, C) ALLEGING THAT U.S. SPEAKS WITH A FORKED TONGUE OR D) SOME OTHER EQUALLY NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION, I WOULD EXPECT RESULTING COVERAGE WOULD BE IRRITATING TO OUR RELATIONS WITH GOB. (INDEED THIS WOULD BE ONE OF OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS' MAIN PURPOSES.) THIS IS A PRICE WE SHOULD PAY OF COURSE, IF BENEFIT TO BE DERIVED IS DEEMED WORTH IT; HOWEVER, I DOUBT THAT ANY TREATMENT WE MIGHT EXPECT FROM OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS WOULD GIVE MUCH COMFORT TO GOG OR TO EMBASSY GUATEMALA'S RELATIONS WITH RODRIGUEZ. MY FINAL POINT IS THAT OUR UNSOLICITED CIRCULATION OF CLARIFICATION TO ALL BELIZE MEDIA GOES BEYOND WHAT RODRIGUEZ IS REPORTED TO HAVE REQUESTED.

6. IF FOREGOING IS ACCEPTABLE, I SUBMIT THAT FOLLOWING POINTS MIGHT BE MADE IN REPLY TO RODRIGUEZ:

- A) CONSUL GENERAL IN BELIZE HAD ALREADY CONVEYED CLARIFICATION TO SOURCE OF BELIZE TIMES EDITORIAL POLICY, NAMELY, THE GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE.
- B) PURSUANT TO TODRIGUEZ REQUEST CONSUL GENERAL IN BELIZE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM DEPT. HAS COMMUNICATED CLARIFICATION DIRECTLY TO BELIZE TIMES.
- C) FULL TEXT OF CLARIFICATION HAD ALREADY BEEN CARRIED BY AN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER BEFORE ANY MENTION OF ORIGINAL STATEMENT

HAD BEEN CARRIED BY NEWSMEDIA IN BELIZE.

D) THAT THERE IS OF COURSE NO ASSURANCE THAT THE BELIZE TIMES
WILL PRINT THE CLARIFICATION.

COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT ADEQUATELY TO DESCRIBE THE INADEQUACIES
OF THE BELIZEAN NEWS MEDIA. MY FORMULA FOR DEALING WITH IT,
BASED ON PAINFUL EXPERIENCE, IS TO HAVE AS LITTLE TO DO WITH IT
AS POSSIBLE. WITHIN THESE LIMITATIONS I THINK WE SHOULD BE AS
RESPONSIVE TO RODRIGUEZ' REQUEST AS WE CAN WITHOUT MAKING
MATTERS WORSE FOR HIM AND FOR US.

GAWF UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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